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ABSTRACT

Throughout students' academic careers, they are required to perform a variety of speech-related activities. According to one study, students with demonstrated communication anxiety are less successful academically. Both the instructor and the librarian can contribute to assisting the student with communication anxiety. Using a variety of instructional techniques and providing independent learning opportunities reduces interpersonal interaction while preparing the student for assignments requiring communication skills. Based on a variety of studies on communication anxiety, librarians should provide specific strategies for conducting library research and appropriate reserve material in support of the class curriculum, whether in print or nonprint format. The instructor can provide class time in support of library research, require deadlines leading up to the presentation, and present videotaped examples of previous presentations with suggestions for appropriate presentation style. (RS)

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Instruction Strategies for the Student with Speech Anxiety

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INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES FOR THE STUDENT WITH SPEECH ANXIETY

INTRODUCTION

Throughout any student's academic career, they are required to perform a variety of speech-related activities. These activities take the form of formal presentations in a class (either individually or with a group), informal class or small group discussions, and one-on-one interviews with instructors or teaching assistants. Developing and practicing speaking skills, whether in a formal or informal setting, has been a component of many general education courses in Theater, Speech, and Communication departments across the country. While "speech courses" begin the development of speaking and presentation skills, students continually need tools for improving and building these skills.

According to one study, students with proven speech anxiety are less successful academically overall. Since these students feel anxious about communication, they avoid any interaction and, when forced into communication, "do so in such a way that undesirable perceptions are formed of them by other communicators"(Boohar and Seiler 1982). Other perceptions of students with communication apprehension are that these

students are less credible and that they are less likely to be successful in their careers.

One component for reducing speech anxiety is preparation before the event. Menzel found a significant relationship between preparation time for presentations (specifically library research) and reduced speech anxiety (Menzel and Carrell 1984). The outcome for students is a better overall experience in the classroom and the outcome for instructors, a higher quality to assignments. Both the instructor and the librarian can offer students with high communication anxiety tools and techniques to be more successful academically.

While library research reduces students' communication anxiety in formal classroom presentations, it has also been proven that the library can also play a role in reducing informal and one-on-one interviews (Boohar and Seiler 1982). Students who are reluctant to question an instructor regarding coursework (even in the privacy of a faculty office, rather than in front of a class) might use the library for course assistance in the form of readings or computer-assisted instructional alternatives. With appropriate planning, the librarian can assist instructors in any department requiring speech

activities, by tailoring library instruction and resources to the course content.

THE LIBRARIAN'S ROLE

Bibliographic Instruction

Academic libraries are no longer solely archives of information, but rather gateways to a vast universe of printed and electronic resources. Students unfamiliar with conducting research in such a setting are often confused and reluctant to get the assistance necessary to gather appropriate information for a presentation. Just when students most need to become competent users of information technology, anxieties can cause them to avoid the library altogether (Warmkessel 1992).

In consultation with the instructor and, given a specific presentation topic, librarians can teach a class about library resources relevant to their assignments. In a standard classroom lecture format, a librarian would introduce students to specific print and electronic sources that will be most helpful in gathering their research in preparation for their presentations. Also, librarians can introduce students to techniques for computerized searching that yield the most effective results.

For the communication anxious student, a library instruction session has both formal and informal benefits. The formal benefits include a longer span of time to develop and research a presentation topic, simply by putting research in their hands well ahead of the "night before." Another formal benefit is that the student can learn library skills in a class setting, which later can be used to work independently on other assignments. One informal benefit of library instruction is the librarian's short-term relationship with the student. Because this relationship has no implications for a grade, students are often more willing to approach a librarian with questions about a presentation rather than approach an instructor one-on-one.

Reserve Collection

Another library service which is in direct support of instruction is the maintenance of a reserve collection. While reserves primarily take the form of readings, many instructors are now using videos as well to build on class lectures. For the communication anxious student, selected readings in addition to required course reading, provide additional approaches to reinforce course content. Readings also reduce the necessary interpersonal interaction of approaching an instructor when a student is struggling with a

course. This can be especially true when the class has a large enrollment and there is little time for discussion.

Video reserves provide the opportunity to give a student specific strategies and demonstrations of effective public speaking techniques. Videos can be of a commercial nature and teach students about presentations. Videos can also be made from previous class presentations, so that students have the opportunity to view a "completed assignment" to understand the instructor's expectations. Building a bibliography of resource material housed in the library for students with speech anxiety provides an instructional alternative to students who are reluctant to ask for help.

THE INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE

Communication with Librarian

Instructors who use textbook chapters for teaching library skills miss the opportunity to stay current with the regular growth and change of their campus library as well as the chance to form a partnership with librarians who are willing to assist in the education of students. Textbooks have additional drawbacks as well. If the textbook was not created on the campus in which it is

used, information about the library may be erroneous. In a survey of library research chapters in textbooks, it was also found that the writers did not emphasize critical thinking skills as related to library research and that online searching was emphasized over print sources, which might actually be more appropriate for some topics. (Sullivan 1989).

Because the library plays a role in reducing speech anxiety and providing students with research materials related to class assignments, instructors should develop a relationship with the appropriate librarian to support their course(s). Instructors who communicate and develop their assignments with a librarian's support are assured that adequate and relevant information exists for students to use in preparing presentations, and that students learn the research skills necessary to become independent researchers. "When librarians and teachers poll their complementary knowledge of students' research needs, a learning situation develops in which students' concerns and anxieties are taken very seriously" (Mark and Jacobson 1995).

In addition to a structured class on teaching library skills, librarians can also assist instructors in identifying and locating instructional alternatives for students who avoid interpersonal interaction. Many

libraries provide development and playback capabilities for software that directly relates to course assignments. Instructors often have the choice between purchasing commercially available software or developing their own software tailored for a course. For the student with communication anxiety, software programs that simply provide additional instructions for course assignments or sample completed assignments could increase that students' opportunity for success in the classroom.

Require Deadlines

One more strategy for assisting the student with communication anxiety is to set deadlines for work leading up to a presentation. Topic selection, an outline, a bibliography, and a required visual aid are all pieces of a presentation that could be submitted for review prior to the actual presentation. Total preparation time correlates positively to the quality of a students' performance. (Menzel and Carrel 1994). Students can also benefit from early feedback by the instructor regarding the development of the presentation topic. By building a timeline for the assignment, students have the opportunity to research and rehearse well before the final grade is applied.

Opportunity for videotaped rehearsals prior to in-class presentations can also add to the student's preparation and reduction in speech anxiety. Videos were discussed as part of the library's role, but the classroom instructor can also use videos for reinforcing speaking skills. Students could be offered the opportunity to rehearse their presentations in front of a video camera and to later review the tape to critique strengths and weaknesses in presentation style. The instructor could show several examples of previous presentations, commenting on particular strengths of each one. Both of these activities remove the communication anxious student from having to receive feedback directly from the instructor, but each activity reinforces positive speaking practice.

Conclusion

Students with demonstrated communication anxiety are less likely to be academically successful. Both the instructor and the librarian can contribute to assisting the student with communication anxiety. Using a variety of instructional techniques and providing independent learning opportunities reduces interpersonal interaction while preparing the student for assignments requiring communication skills.

Based on a variety of studies on communication anxiety, librarians should provide specific strategies for conducting library research and appropriate reserve material in support of the class curriculum, whether in print or nonprint format. The instructor can provide class time in support of library research, require deadlines leading up to the presentation, and present videotaped examples of previous presentations with suggestions for appropriate presentation style.

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